Transforming the Representation of Indian Women in Popular Media with Reference to Indian Web Series

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Abstract: *Internet streaming services are captivating viewers and generating unprecedented revenue. They are arguing about the lack of progress in television content and the increasing opportunities for the emergence of rich, high-quality material. With the rise of online streaming platforms, the entertainment business is being transformed as dramatic television programming is being replaced with new and easily accessible stories. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted numerous industries, although it has also facilitated the rise of Over The Top (OTT) platforms and witnessed a surge in subscriptions. Individuals resorted to web series as a means of alleviating the tedium of their daily routines, since they found themselves confined to their homes without alternative sources of amusement. The web series was also acknowledged for breaking gender stereotypes and transforming the portrayal of women in mainstream media. The researcher aims to analyze the revised depiction, while the investigation involved surveying audiences. The data collected from the survey helps to comprehend the elements that contribute to the triumph of OTT platforms, as well as the public's response to the changing portrayal of women in mainstream media*

Keywords: OTT, transforming, conventional media, web series

I. INTRODUCTION

The millennial generation has a strong affinity for web programs that can be streamed on platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and Hoi Choi. Indian film is seeing rapid growth as a result of India's technological progress. Indian television and film are being swiftly transformed by the internet and mobile phones. Indian fans currently consume movies, documentaries, and other video content via social networking sites, emerging digital platforms, and wi-fi sticks. (Singh, 2018) The content of the internet series is more easily understood and connected to by its younger viewers. Additional advantages include the capacity to observe at one's preferred speed and the genuineness of the information. The growth and profits of these online streaming companies have been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Online streaming platforms are diligently striving to increase their number of users and achieving great success, particularly at a period when movie theatres are mandated to stay closed due to lockdowns and social isolation. The demand for digital entertainment has transitioned from a passing fad to an essential requirement. Another noteworthy advancement is the way in which web shows have transformed the portrayal of women to accurately depict the current era. The media is widely recognized as a powerful influence in shaping, perpetuating, and eliminating certain portrayals or stereotypes of women. The web series aims to counter the prevalent representation of women in popular media that often reinforces stereotypes. They portray women as people who are developing their identities autonomously from males. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown have inadvertently benefited OTT platforms in India, including as Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALT Balaji, Zee5, MX Player, and Hoichi, among others. The decline of television networks and movie theatres as the central entertainment hub has been precipitated by this phenomenon (Bhattacharyya, 2020). The implementation of lockdown measures and the requirement to stay at home. The imposition of restrictions in India has forced individuals to increasingly rely on internet entertainment, hence accelerating a pre-existing tendency. This trend has been further fuelled by the substantial investments made by major platforms to attract customers away from traditional theaters (The Hindu, 2020).

The advent of new media is causing significant changes in our daily lives. The Indian cinema industry is undergoing rapid transformation due to the influence of the internet (Singh, 2019). The main incentive for utilizing Over The Top (OTT) programs is for the purpose of amusement. The mobility of technology is the primary reason for utilizing this service. On-demand programming is available as stated by Singh (2019). Mobile internet traffic in India has surpassed desktop internet traffic. Most customers now use mobile devices to access the internet. Producers and directors were cognizant of the fact that securing a substantial duration for their movie in theaters would be arduous, even after the lifting of lockdown limitations. Prior to the lockout, digital premieres were not considered a novelty. Nevertheless, a significant and transformative shift has occurred due to the prolonged closure of the theaters for over four months. (Mitra, 2020) According to Salih (2020), the increasing number of movies being released on OTT platforms will result in the dominance of these platforms in the entertainment industry in the near future. Several movies have been completed, and a handful are nearing completion. Several further Bollywood films are slated for a direct-to-OTT release following the success of GulaboSitabo, Dil Bechara, and Shakuntala Devi. These films span all genres, including horror-comedies and historical war movies (Mitra, 2020).

The Bollywood film "GulaboSitabo," starring Amitabh Bachchan, was originally anticipated to attract a large audience. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures in India, the film was released exclusively on Amazon.com Inc.'s Prime streaming service, ensuring that it reached a wide viewership despite the circumstances (The Hindu, 2020). While Amazon Prime does not disclose the specific viewership numbers for Shakuntala Devi, it is estimated that the platform has around 20 million subscribers in India, and it is expected that at least 20% of these subscribers would watch the film. Consequently, a minimum of 4-5 million individuals ought to view this film on Amazon Prime. With a budget of 25 crores, the movie was projected to be acquired by Amazon Prime for 35 crores, resulting in a net profit of 10 crores.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Web series break away from traditional television formats since there are no strict time constraints and no censorship concerns. They also provide a means to keep audiences interested and coming back for more. It is praised in an article in Outlook as a "bracing antidote against repression. Every significant character in "Made in Heaven" is hoping to be released from some kind of oppression. The finest desi original on Amazon Prime, according to Soumya Shrivastava, "unmasks the dazzling falsehoods of large fat Indian weddings". Aside from that, he adds that "Created in Heaven explicitly tackles and foregrounds current socio-political issues, especially those that don't normally fit into popular narratives, unlike numerous shows and films being made now."

With more people in India watching videos in Hindi and other regional languages, streaming platforms have the chance to create content for a specific audience. The language and presentation of the shows are bold, spicy, and mature in character, completely unlike the current programming shown on television. If one were to look at the content of the shows streamed on OTT platforms, they would be startled. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators 2020 report, wired internet subscribers would make up 3.24% of all internet subscribers by September 2019 while mobile device access will account for 96.68% of all internet users.

According to McKinsey Global Institute's 2019 report, "Digital India: Technology to Transform a Connection Nation," by 2023, India would have a 40% increase in internet users and a doubling of its smartphone population. According to the report, India now has more than 550 million internet users, ranking second in the world, and by 2023, this number may rise to 800 million as a result of the growing affordability and availability of smartphones and high- speed connectivity. Indians used more than 54 times as much data in 2018 as they did in mid- 2016 thanks to the government's Digital India Initiative and appealing packages provided by commercial telecommunications firms to internet customers. The research also notes that when it comes to digital user interaction in the areas of messaging, tweeting, purchasing, and streaming, India is digitising more quickly than all but one other nation in the study, Indonesia. Following the widespread and inexpensive availability of internet via mobile phones, material is now accessible in internet "dark zones," particularly in semi-urban and rural locations. According to the Indian OTT Platforms Report 2019 by Mudra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad and Communication Crafts, many of these users are first-generation consumers of OTT content. A paradigm shift from television sets to mobile screens has been brought about by smartphones and internet services, which are not only necessities but also a new source of enjoyment.

Because they are aimed at young people, the web series' fresh realistic innovation topics attract a lot of viewers. It's a cutting-edge platform for business investment, and firms are modernising their branding tactics to compete in the digital sphere.

2.1 The portrayal of women in web series:

According to research, women's value in a movie is mostly determined by whether they identify as a mother, wife, or lover. In contrast to the industrious and adventurous male characters, women are represented as being overly emotional, dependant on other people, and limited to low-status employment. The return of formulaic portrayals in today's prime-time stories has been labelled as a "backlash" by some analysts. Independent women are portrayed as needing control, but by the story's conclusion, they have become doormats or shadows. In these tales, the "traditional" Indian lady is praised for her household tasks and attention on them. The plot of the programme wants us to think that the characters are ambitious, yet they seldom ever demonstrate that. Their assertiveness, badass attitude, and unapologetic self can occasionally come across as forced and lacking in foundation, according to a News18.com report. (News18) Web series culture in India is seen as a new wave of narrating women's experiences, reflecting their reality, with the advent of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and several other streaming services, and their original content. In contrast to the usual television soap operas' socially acceptable sanskari protagonists, characters like Poroma Sarkar from Love, Lust, and Confusion and Megha n Lust Stories take on bolder on-screen personas. Numerous online series, such Sacred Games, Mirzapur, Pitchers, Permanent Roommates, or Lust Stories, which featured strong female characters and received great praise for their performances, have become highly popular with viewers. Despite the fact that these stories primarily follow male protagonists, female leads like Kubra Sait, Radhika Apte, Shweta Tripathi, Riska Duggal, MaanviGagroo, and Nidhi Singh have been successful in forging a distinct identity from the stereotypical and typecast roles that women in TV series typically play. These people are thought of as being contemporary, progressive, and highly relatable. Tara from Made in Heaven demonstrates to the world how a career-focused woman may be as feminine as she chooses to be while still relentlessly pursuing her aspirations. One of the few good representations of a trans woman on television is Cukoo from Sacred Games, while Vartika

Chaturved, an IPS officer in Delhi Crime, demonstrated how strong, tough, and supportive women can be. Shreya, the female lead in TVF Pitchers, puts her passion ahead of her relationship, sending a clear message to the viewers.

III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the essay is to critically evaluate the web series in order to examine how women are portrayed in their material and how this deviate from the stereotyped representation of women in popular culture. The information is given new life by this updated portrayal, which is somewhat more accurate. The article also intends to investigate millennials' interest in Indian online series.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online poll was carried out using a quantitative technique to determine the web series' popularity in India. The poll was carried out using Google Forms, and the answers were examined in order to determine the factors contributing to the success of the Indian web series and the acceptance of the newly developing identity of women as it is represented in the series. In order to comprehend the study goals of the article and the effects that the Indian web series' representation of the changing position of women is having on society, secondary data was also gathered.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics: The majority of the respondents to the online survey are between the ages of 18 and 25, which indicates that millennials have replied most frequently, while the age range covered by the study was 18 to 45.

Genre of Web Series: Figure 1 displays the types of web series that respondents, who are web series viewers, find most appealing. The graph below indicates that Drama (58.4%), Comedy (72.6%), Romance (66.4%), and Crime (61.9%) are the most well-liked genres, have a better affinity with the youthful audience, and are more likely to get critical acclaim. Additionally, a sizeable portion of the respondents were told that the genres of family and thriller are ones that they

enjoy. 20.2% of respondents said in the poll that they would be interested in viewing horror or thriller-related content. On the other hand, 30.1% of respondents said they enjoy viewing stories about family life.

Popularity of OTT platforms:

When the respondents were asked which OTT platforms they used to view content, 45.1% said they preferred Hoi Choi, 51.3% said they preferred Hotstar, and 53.1% said they chose Amazon. Of the respondents, 62.8% are fans of Netflix. 15.9% of people favour Zee 5, while 21.2% prefer Voot.

91% of the respondents agreed that there has been a revolution in the portrayal of women in web series, and a huge majority of audiences are quite receptive of this as they believe this will bring about a significant change in the mindset and culture of the society. Hardly 9% of respondents were of the opinion that there has been no particular change in the representation of women in web series. When asked if there has been a significant change in how women

were portrayed in Indian web series, a responder responded, "Yes, they are redefining whatever Indian women signify. Women have always been the foundation of every country in the globe, and their contributions to society have a significant positive impact, according to a young media student. We have a wide variety of audiences throughout India. Web series are popular among young people, therefore promoting the subject of women's empowerment through various series serves to inform people about the safety of women and the need of not discriminating on the basis of gender or caste. Women are just as capable as males, if not more so. "Yes, it has provided numerous vast options to demonstrate and portray one's talent through the screenplay," another respondent stated. Another individual affirmed the change by responding, "Yes, of course.

Take Jamtara or Delhi crimes as examples. When discussing the television dramas, a millennial said, "Yes. Finally, Indian online programmes are moving away from the stereotypical Saas- Bahu representation of women. For instance, Kavya from Little Things, Meera from Girl in the City, Damini, Siddhi, Anjana from Please take four more shots, Chanchal from Tripling, and many others. The list goes on forever. When talking about how gender roles are evolving, it is important to include how the LGBTQ community is represented. A commenter on this topic stated, "Exploring women's sexuality or people's sexuality in general is not viewed as "risqué" as it is for TV channels as the general content consumers are young adults and teens. The taboo nature of women's sexuality, which includes aspects like polyamory, LGBTQ, and domination, is eloquently shown by the web series.

According to the data that was gathered, the respondents notably enjoyed the online series Sacred Games, Byomkesh, Kota Factory, Little Things, Girl in the City, Mirzapur, Stories by Tagore, A Family Man, Ghost stories, etc. These were the respondents' top-favored television shows. Some of them, however, spoke about places like Kota Factory, Made in Heaven, Charitraheen, and Permanent Roommates. One commenter made the following observation about the female leads in web series' choice of clothing and cosmetics: "First of all, there has been a big shift in the manner that female protagonists have experimented with their looks. Focus should be placed more on the personalities of the characters rather than their appearance or skin tone, as well as on how elevated the standing of the female protagonists is in the plot. Many online series, according to a large fan of web series, are emphasising women's empowerment and including female protagonists. A millennial, however, said that rather than continuing with the same old plot, web series writers should aim to produce unique material.

VI. CONCLUSION

Both web series and movies are highly efficient means of communication. Researchers have found that communication plays a crucial part in the creation, upkeep, and modification of cultures. In order for a civilization to progress, it must actively strive to overcome outdated traditions and modes of thought that often hinder its advancement. The evolving portrayal of women in web series is simultaneously challenging deeply rooted gender norms in individuals' perceptions. These entities possess significant sway, are surpassing in nature, and possess the ability to modify individuals' viewpoints and conduct in a positive manner.

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